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Environment Secretary Ron Curry Meets with EPA Officials to Pledge Assistance on Ruidoso Water Quality Issue

(Santa Fe, NM) —New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Secretary Ron Curry traveled to Dallas this week to meet with the leadership of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Region 6. At this meeting, Secretary Curry offered the assistance of NMED in resolving a recent water quality order issued to the Village of Ruidoso and the City of Ruidoso Downs by the EPA.

In December, the Village of Ruidoso and the City of Ruidoso Downs received an administrative order from EPA. This enforcement action stemmed from violations at the communities' jointly operated wastewater treatment plant, chiefly from high levels of phosphorous at the plant's outfall into the Rio Ruidoso. The communities are currently seeking funding for a new wastewater treatment plant that, along with planned nonpoint controls, will help handle area growth and meet phosphorous standards.

"Ruidoso and Ruidoso Downs are trying to do the right thing and are headed in the correct direction," said Secretary Curry. "I hope that with our assistance, these communities can get this EPA enforcement issue resolved in a way that they can live with and that protects the river from pollution."

Secretary Curry met with EPA Regional Administrator Mayor Richard Greene on January 4. This talk followed a joint session of the Village and City's Councils that the Secretary attended in December. At this joint session the Councils requested the assistance of NMED in dealing with EPA on this enforcement issue.

"NMED stands ready to assist communities where we can with these water quality issues," said Secretary Curry. "Surface water enforcement is a particularly tough issue since it is the only area of environmental enforcement that the state does not control. This means that, instead of in-state regulators, communities like Ruidoso are forced to deal with the U.S. EPA in Dallas. Plane tickets alone can really break the bank for many small New Mexico communities."

NMED is currently in the early stages of exploring the options for acquiring authority over surface water quality permitting and enforcement at the state level. The state has convened a regulation advisory group consisting of industry, environmental, local and state officials to examine this issue. Under current timelines, NMED would ask the 2006 legislature for the legal authority to take over surface water protection and enforcement responsibilities at the state level.

For further information contact Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED at (505) 827-0314.

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